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ABSTRACT

This report describes selected eating and exercise patterns among a sample of 2,237 Nebraska youth in grades 9-12 selected from a random sample of 24 junior and senior high schools. The eating patterns reported cover food selection, body image, weight management, and weight loss methods. The exercise patterns relate to the frequency of "hard" physical activity, participation in community recreation, the effect of physical education classes, the incidence of hard physical exercises in such classes, and television watching. Results reported in this document include the following: (1) approximately 3 of 10 adolescents did not eat a single serving of green or yellow vegetables or fruit or fruit juice on the day prior to the survey; (2) almost 29% of females said they were too fat, as did almost 17% of the males; (3) despite 61% claiming that their weight was just about right, only 33.7% said they were not doing something to change their weight; (4) exercise was the most popular weight loss method; (5) in the 14 days prior to the survey, 17.7% had not exercised "hard," with males being more likely than females to be frequent "hard" exercisers; (6) two-thirds had not participated in any community recreation activity in the previous 14 days; (7) more than half indicated that they do not take, or do not attend, physical education classes; and (8) the greatest percentage (33.7) watched television more than one hour but less than three hours per day. (ABL)

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EATING AND EXERCISING: NEBRASKA ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

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Technical
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EATING AND EXERCISING: NEBRASKA ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS

Eating and Exercising: Nebraska Adolescents' Attitudes and Behaviors

Ian M. Newman, Ph.D.

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for Alcohol and Drug Abuse
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Prevention Center Papers
Technical Report 25
December 1991

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Technical Report 25
Eating and Exercising: Nebraska Adolescents' Attitudes and Behaviors

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INTRODUCTION

This report describes selected eating and exercise patterns among a sample of 2,237 Nebraska youth in grades 9-12 selected from a random sample of 24 Nebraska junior and senior high schools. The data are from the 1990 Youth Risk Behavior Survey developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and conducted with this sample of Nebraska adolescents by the staff of Health Education, Inc., under contract to the Nebraska Department of Education.

The eating patterns reported here are food selection, body image, weight management and dieting. The exercise patterns relate to the frequency of "hard" exercise, participation in community recreation, physical education classes, and television watching.

EATING PATTERNS

Food Selection

The self-reported data gathered for this sample of Nebraska adolescents suggests that approximately 3 of 10 adolescents in grades 9-12 did not eat a single serving of green or yellow vegetables or fruit or fruit juice on the day prior to survey. The proportion not eating vegetables or fruit did not differ greatly across the four grade levels or between males or females (Table 1).

Sixty-four percent or approximately 6 out of 10 students report eating fried food on the previous day. At every grade level a larger proportion of males than females were likely to have eaten fried foods (Table 1).

Body Image and Weight

For many young people being too fat or too thin is a major concern. Their behaviors related to being too fat or too thin are often unhealthy. Body image, and not health or fitness, unfortunately appears to be the prime motivation for important decisions that affect health.

Among this sample of Nebraska adolescents in grades 9-12 in public schools, 10.9% saw themselves as "too thin" (underweight): 4.5% females and 16.8% males. Almost twenty-nine percent (28.5) saw themselves as "too fat" (overweight). Among the females 41% said they were "too fat" and among the males, 16.6%.

Of the females, 54.5% said their weight is "just about right" as did 66.5% of the males (Table 2).

These sex-related differences in perceptions toward body size characterize all the data on eating practices presented in this report. Females tend to see themselves as overweight; males are more likely to see themselves as underweight. Eating practices reflect these perceptual differences.

The proportion of the females who consider themselves "too thin" declined from 7.9% in grade 9 to 3.4% in grade 12. The

proportion of "too thin" males changed as grade level increases with almost twice as many 12th grade males as 9th grade males saying they are "too thin" (Table 2).

The proportion of females who consider themselves "too fat" increases with grade level: 37.0% at 9th grade, 53.4% at 12th grade. The proportion of males who consider themselves "too fat" is relatively constant across the grades (Table 2).

Weight Management

Despite 61% of this sample saying their weight is about right, only 33.7% say they are not trying to do something to change their weight. Almost one-third (30.8%) say they are trying to lose weight, 22.4% say they are trying to keep from gaining any weight and 13% say they are trying to gain more weight. These proportions differ significantly for males and females (Figure 1).

Clearly males are less concerned about changing their weight than females. Almost half are not doing anything about their weight and this proportion differs little across the grades. Females on the other hand are likely to be trying to lose weight: 47.4% compared to 15.0% of the males (Figure 1). Among the older females, those in grades 11 and 12, a larger proportion (53.0%) are trying to lose weight than those in grades 9 and 10 (42.9%).

Females are also more likely to be trying to avoid gaining weight: 29.6% compared to 15.8% of the males.

Males at every grade level are more likely than females to be trying to gain weight: 22.3% compared to 3.1% of the females. This proportion increases as grade level increases: 17.5% of the 9th grade to 25.7% of the 12th grade.

Weight Loss Methods

Weight management methods varied. Exercise was the most popular weight loss method followed by meal skipping, diet pills and vomiting (Figure 2).

Exercise. Exercise, in the 7 days prior to the survey, as a means of losing weight or keeping from gaining weight, was reported by 44.5% of this sample; 60.4% of the females and 29.4% of the males. Of the 44.5% who reported exercising 33.7% did so only once or twice in the prior 7 days; 66.3% exercised 3 or more times in the 7 days prior to the survey.

Skipping Meals. More than half the females (55.2%) in this sample of Nebraska adolescents skipped meals for the purpose of losing weight in the seven days prior to the survey; 22.3% of the males did also. The proportion of females who skipped at least one meal in the week prior to the survey increased from 51.4% at the 9th grade to 61.4% at 12th grade (Figure 2; Table 3).

This survey did not explore the duration of meal skipping behavior but frequency of skipping gives some idea of the acceptability of the practice. Of those who had skipped meals in the previous 7 days 52.0% had done so 3 or more times. Of the females who skipped meals 53.6% had skipped 3 or more meals in the previous week. Of the males who skipped meals, 48.6% had skipped 3 or more meals in the previous week.

Diet Pills. Diet pills are perceived as an easily available method to lose weight or to prevent weight gain. Of this sample 14.3% say they had used diet pills at some time: 22.1% of the females and 6.8% of the males. Of those who had used diet pills 3.4% say they had done so in the 7 days prior to the survey (Figure 2).

Vomiting. Publicity about the frequency and potential dangers of vomiting to lose weight has caused significant public concern. Among this sample of Nebraska adolescents 10.4% admit to having vomited "to lose weight or keep from gaining weight" but only 3.5% admitted to doing so in the 7 days prior to survey: 4.5% of the females and 2.8% of the males (Figure 2).

Table 1
Food selection—one or more servings in the previous day (meal or snack)
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Green or yellow vegetables	70.3	68.6	73.2	68.1
Fruit or fruit juice	71.7	74.6	72.4	60.9
Fried food	60.1	58.3	55.3	64.4
N =	318	277	262	222
MALES				
Green or yellow vegetables	72.3	74.0	70.5	71.9
Fruit or fruit juice	77.0	75.7	69.7	72.4
Fried food	67.1	68.1	68.8	71.6
N =	266	280	264	330
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Green or yellow vegetables		71.2		
Fruit or fruit juice		72.1		
Fried food		64.3		
N =		2219		

Table 2
Perceptions of body weight
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Too thin (underweight)	7.9	4.0	2.5	3.4
About right	55.1	60.8	56.3	43.2
Too fat (overweight)	37.0	35.2	41.2	53.4
N =	318	277	262	222
MALES				
Too thin (underweight)	12.7	16.3	15.3	21.8
About right	70.7	68.0	65.5	62.8
Too fat (overweight)	16.6	15.7	19.2	15.4
N =	265	277	262	324
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Too thin (underweight)		10.9		
About right		60.6		
Too fat (overweight)		28.5		
N =		2207		

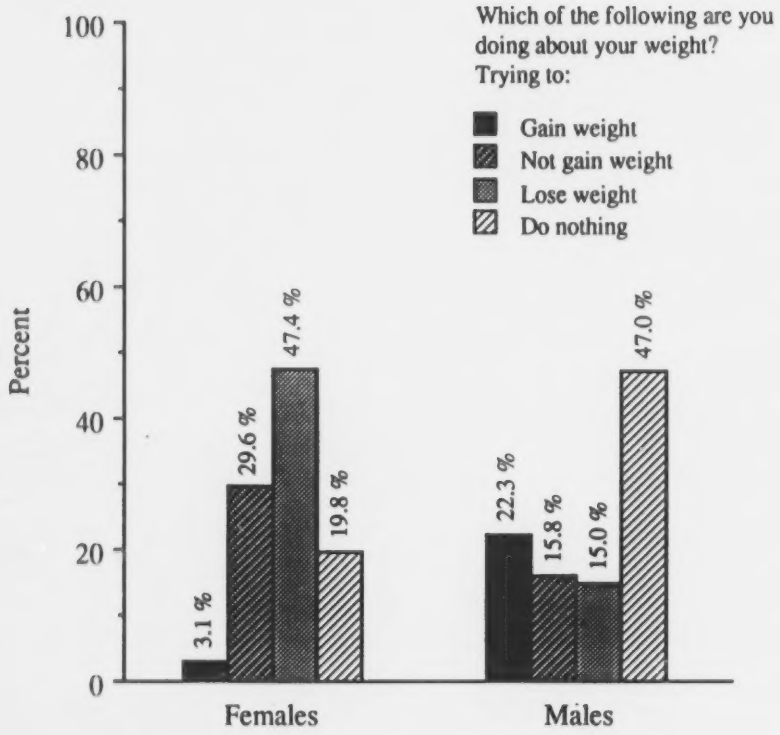

Figure 1
Weight management behaviors
1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

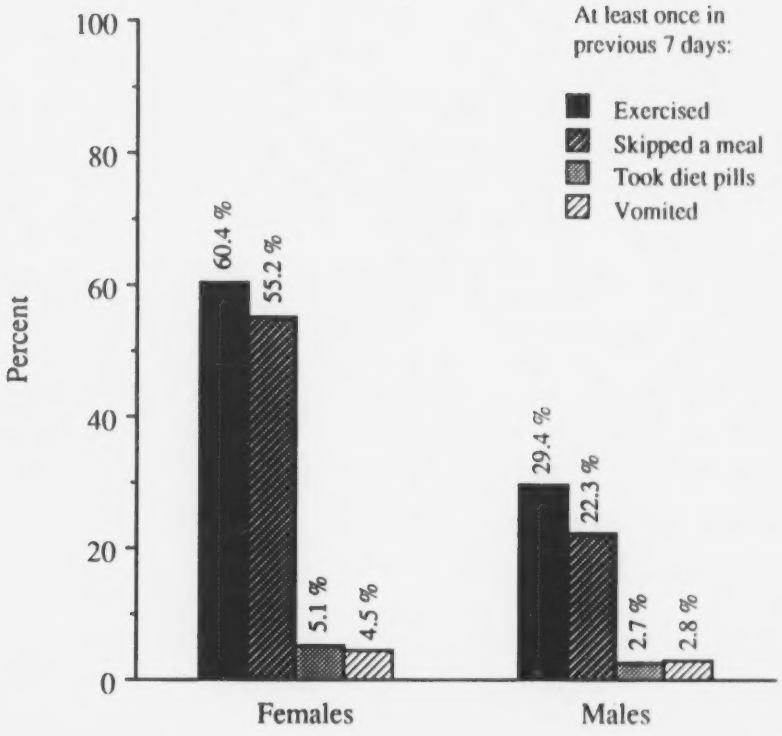

Figure 2
Weight management methods used to lose weight or prevent weight gain
1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 3
Skipped meals in the previous 7 days
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Never	48.6	47.4	43.0	38.6
1-2 times	26.1	21.7	24.1	31.2
3-6 times	15.1	17.3	20.8	20.9
7 or more times	10.1	13.6	12.1	9.2
N =	316	277	261	221
MALES				
Never	79.3	83.2	68.8	78.8
1-2 times	11.0	8.6	18.3	8.8
3-6 times	7.3	6.8	9.1	6.9
7 or more times	2.3	1.3	3.8	5.5
N =	266	280	264	326
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Never	61.7			
1-2 times	18.3			
3-6 times	12.7			
7 or more times	7.2			
N =	2211			

EXERCISE PATTERNS

Physical activity and adolescence often seem synonymous. However, if physical activity is defined to include "at least 20 minutes of *hard* exercise that makes you breathe heavily and makes your heart beat fast (for example, playing basketball, jogging, fast dancing, or fast cycling)" then physical activity and adolescence are far from synonymous. Accepting that hard physical activity lasting at least twenty minutes should occur at least three times a week for clear cardiovascular benefits, then only a minority of Nebraska adolescents are physically active enough to reap such benefits.

Hard Physical Activity

In the fourteen days prior to the survey, 17.7% of this sample had not exercised "hard." Another 43.9 % had exercised "hard" on at least one day but not more than 6 days. This level is judged insufficient to reap clear cardiovascular benefit. Adding those who do not exercise to those who had exercised less than 6 days (3 times a week) meant 61.6% of this sample was *not* getting enough "hard" exercise for cardiovascular benefit (Table 4). Males were more likely than females to be frequent "hard" exercisers (Figure 3).

Any exercise, even light exercise, has benefits other than the cardiovascular effects, so 82.3% of this sample was probably getting some benefit from their exercise patterns (Table 4).

More females in the 12th grade were getting no exercise or less than optimal hard exercise (82.8%) than females in the 9th grade (69.1%). The difference across the grades for males was minimal with approximately half of this sample getting no exercise or insufficient exercise. In total these results suggest that only about 3 out of every 10 adolescents were exercising regularly in a pattern that could provide clear cardiovascular benefit.

Of those who did "hard" exercise six or more times in the previous 14 days, there was a significant likelihood that they would actually

exercise nine or more times. Of those who indicated they exercised six or more times in the last 14 days, two-thirds (66%) indicated that they exercised nine or more times. Those who are active tend to be very active. For the females differences in the proportion of those who exercised "hard" 6 or more times declined with grade level, but for males the decline is not so sharp.

Community Recreation Participation

In an attempt to identify how important organizations such as sports leagues, dance classes, recreation centers, community centers and "Y's" were in influencing exercise patterns, these adolescents were asked how often in the previous 14 days they had done "any kind of exercise" in places like these. Two-thirds (66.6%) said they had not participated in any community recreation in the previous 14 days. Fifteen percent (15.1%) said they had participated in activities in community recreation on 1 or 2 of the previous 14 days, and 18.3% said they had done so on three or more occasions in the previous 14 days (Figure 4). These proportions are separated by sex in Table 5. Clearly community recreation is not a significant influence on the exercise patterns of Nebraska's adolescents.

While exercise in community recreation is not common, a small proportion of this sample did participate frequently enough for some physical fitness benefits (10.3%). Males were almost twice as likely as females to have exercised in community recreation centers 6 or more times in the previous 2 weeks. For both females and males there was a noted drop in participation at any level of frequency between the 10th and 11th grades (Table 5).

Physical Education Classes

An important question has to do with the influence of school physical education programs on the activity patterns of youngsters. This Nebraska sample was asked about the frequency of participation in physical education classes in the previous 14 days (Figure 5; Table 6) and also the frequency of hard exercise during these classes (Table 7).

More than half of this sample of students (54.5%) indicated they do *not* take physical education classes or if they do, they don't attend. Only one-third of this sample had physical education classes often enough (3 times per week; 6 times in the last 14 days) to experience possible cardiovascular benefits if they participated in hard exercise in all their classes. Twelve percent of the students in this sample did not have class frequently enough to experience cardiovascular benefits even if they did exercise strenuously in the classes they attended. If some element of cardiovascular physical fitness was the objective of these physical education programs rescheduling classes less often than 3 times/week represents curriculum planning incompetence (Table 6; Figure 5).

The distribution of physical education participation was different among 9th and 10th grade students compared to 11th and 12th grade students: 65.9% of the 9th and 10th graders attended physical education class at least once in the previous 14 days but only 24.1% of 11th and 12th graders did. At all grade levels a larger proportion of males took physical education classes that met six or more times in the previous 14 days than did females. The proportional differences were greater among the 11th and 12th grades than the 9th and 10th grades with almost twice the proportion of males taking physical education class that met 6 or more times in the previous 2 weeks compared to females (Table 6).

Hard Exercise in Physical Education Classes

It is one thing to attend physical education class but another to participate in a physical education class that provides cardiovascular benefit. In this respect, cardiovascular benefit is defined as "hard" exercise that lasts at least 20 minutes and which occurs six or more times in 14 days (at least 3 times per week).

Of those students who took and attended physical education classes, 22% admitted that they did not get 20 minutes of hard physical exercise in the previous 14 days. More than one-third (41.1%) indicate that their physical education classes did include hard physical exercise but only between 1 and 5 times in the previous 14 days, not frequently enough for

cardiovascular benefit. Only 37% of students enrolled in physical education classes participated in hard physical activity in those classes six or more times in the previous 14 days (Table 7). In other words, a little more than one-third of these students in physical education classes received sufficiently vigorous and frequent physical activities to gain clear cardiovascular benefit. Males were more likely to participate in physical education classes with vigorous physical activity meeting 6 or more times than females (Figure 6).

Taking the entire sample of 9th through 12th grades, only 17.2% participated in physical education classes that included "hard" physical exercise 6 or more times in the previous 14 days.

Hours of Television Watching

Hours spent watching television may reduce hours available for exercise. Male and female patterns of television watching did not differ greatly. The largest proportion of these students watches television 1-3 hours before and/or after school on a typical school day (Figure 7). Almost twelve percent (11.5%) admit to watching no television, a proportion that is about constant across the four grade levels studied.

Females are more likely to watch television less than one hour and males are more likely to watch television more than four hours a day (Figure 7). A larger proportion of 9th-grade students watch 3 or more hours of television per day than do 12th grade students (Table 8).

Table 4
Hard exercise in the last 14 days
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
None	12.9	16.9	24.7	33.2
1-5 times	56.2	48.0	48.8	49.6
% of sample getting less than sufficient exercise	69.1	64.9	73.5	82.8
6 or more times	30.9	35.0	26.4	17.2
% of those who hard exercise 6 or more times who hard exercise 9 or more times	64.3	56.7	62.3	57.9
N =	317	276	262	222
MALES				
None	13.8	12.8	16.2	15.3
1-5 times	36.0	35.3	39.0	38.0
% of sample getting less than sufficient exercise	49.8	48.1	55.2	53.3
6 or more times	50.1	51.9	44.7	46.7
% of those who hard exercise 6 or more times who hard exercise 9 or more times	72.7	69.4	73.7	61.0
N =	263	279	263	329

TOTAL SAMPLE	
None	17.7
1-5 times	43.9
% of sample getting less than sufficient exercise	61.6
6 or more times	38.5
% of those who hard exercise 6 or more times who hard exercise 9 or more times	66.0
N =	2211

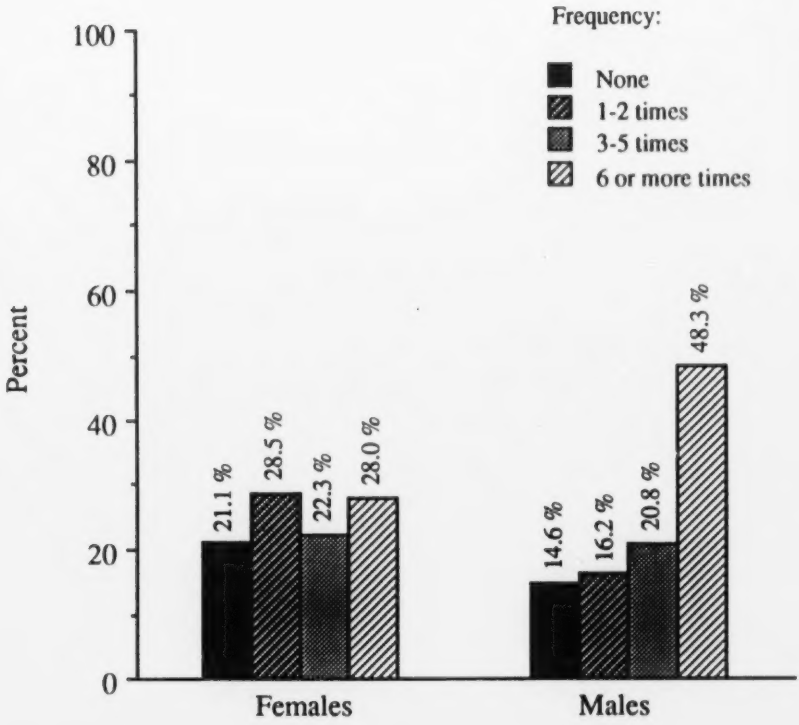

Figure 3
Hard exercise in last 14 days
1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

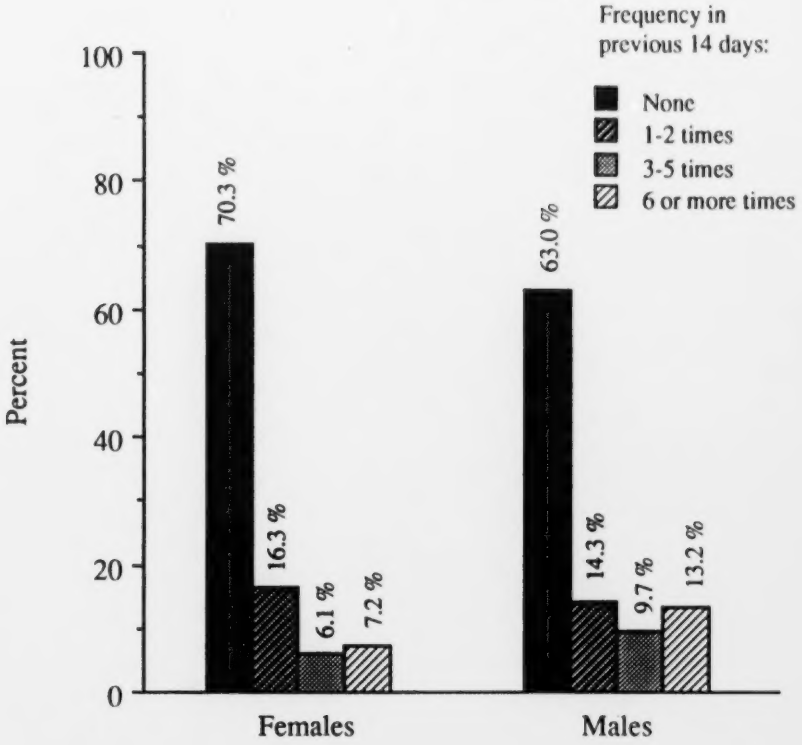

Figure 4
Exercise at community rec center
1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 5
Exercise at community recreation center in last 14 days
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Never	63.2	65.9	77.4	77.3
1-5 times	28.0	23.9	18.5	18.1
6 or more times	8.9	10.2	4.1	4.7
N =	311	275	262	219
MALES				
Never	57.7	58.9	65.6	68.8
1-5 times	27.9	23.6	22.1	21.9
6 or more times	14.5	17.5	12.3	9.4
N =	256	272	258	326
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Never	66.6			
1-5 times	23.1			
6 or more times	10.3			
N =	21179			

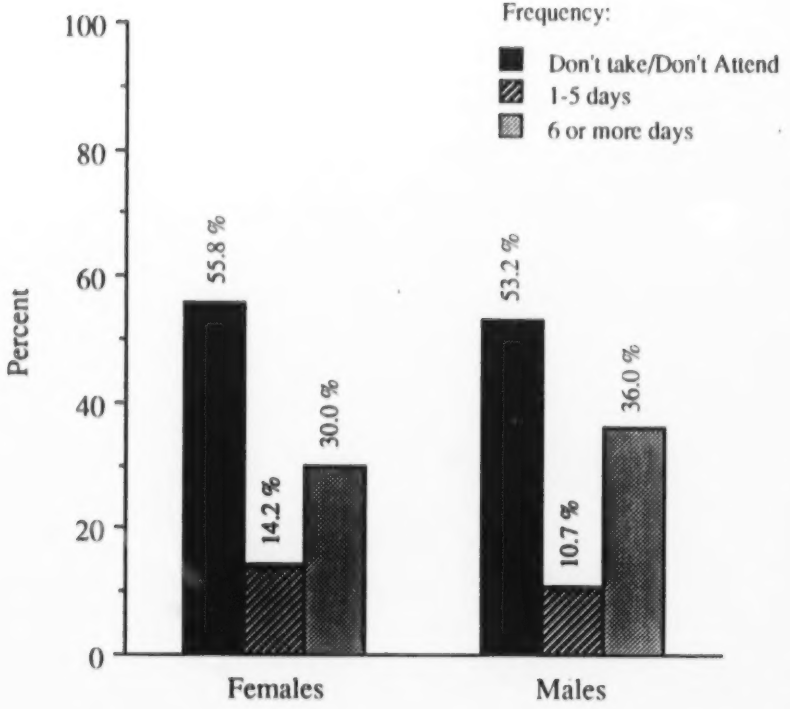

Figure 5
Physical education classes in last 14 days
1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 6
Frequency of physical education class in last 14 days
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Don't take/don't attend	25.8	43.7	79.9	84.6
1-5 times	23.6	18.4	6.8	4.8
More than 6 times	50.7	37.8	13.3	10.6
N =	313	277	260	222
MALES				
Don't take/don't attend	28.1	39.4	71.4	70.7
1-5 times	13.9	14.2	7.2	7.7
More than 6 times	58.1	46.3	21.3	21.7
N =	261	276	260	328
TOTAL SAMPLE				
Don't take/don't attend	54.5			
1-5 times	12.4			
More than 6 times	33.1			
N =	2197			

Table 7
Frequency of hard exercise in class in last 14 days among respondents taking/attending physical education.
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
Don't do 20 minutes of hard exercise	17.6	38.5	24.1	23.5
1-5 days	47.6	37.8	50.0	29.4
More than 6 times	34.8	23.7	25.9	47.1
N =	227	156	54	34
MALES				
Don't do 20 minutes of hard exercise	15.2	22.2	18.8	20.4
1-5 days	33.7	42.6	44.4	36.9
More than 6 times	51.1	35.2	36.6	42.7
N =	184	176	90	103

TOTAL SAMPLE	
Don't do 20 minutes of hard exercise	22.0
1-5 days	41.1
More than 6 times	37.0
N =	1024

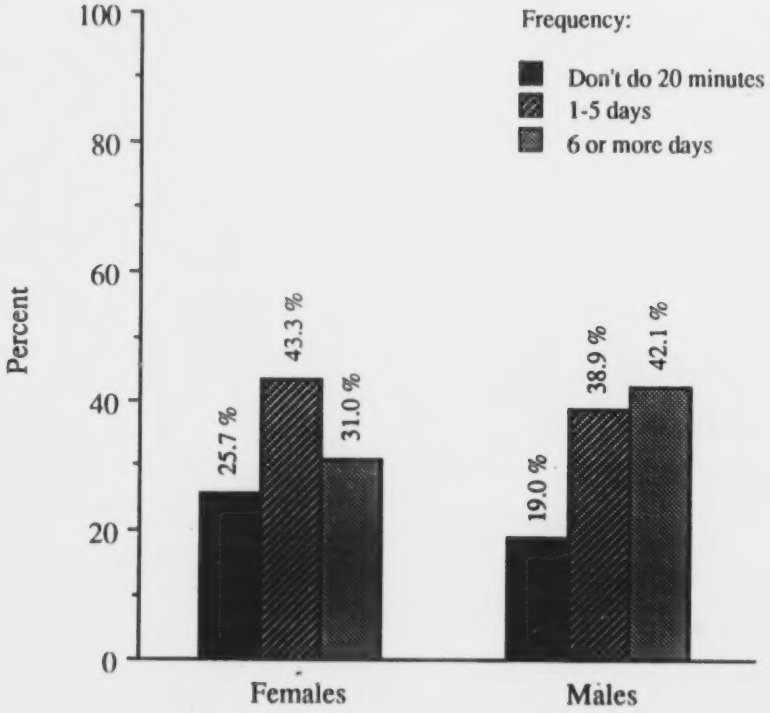

Figure 6
Physical education classes with at least 20 minutes of hard exercise

1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

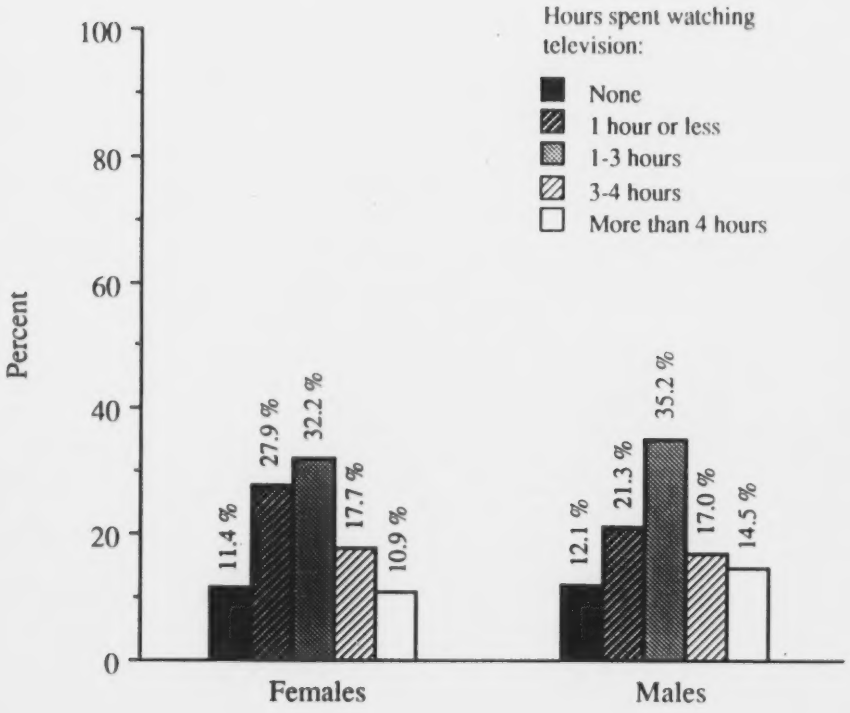

Figure 7
Hours of television watching per day before and/or after school

1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

Table 8
Average hours of television watching before or after school
The 1990 Nebraska Youth Risk Behavior Survey

	Grade 9 %	Grade 10 %	Grade 11 %	Grade 12 %
FEMALES				
None	10.7	12.5	10.7	11.7
1 hour or less/day	21.8	31.7	28.4	31.2
More than 1 hour but less than 3 hours/day	35.4	29.1	31.7	31.8
3 - 4 hours/day	20.0	18.1	17.9	14.2
More than 4 hours/day	12.2	8.6	11.2	11.1
N =	312	277	262	222
MALES				
None	11.8	13.8	11.9	11.2
1 hour or less/day	17.4	20.8	21.9	24.1
More than 1 hour but less than 3 hours/day	28.5	34.5	40.8	36.3
3 - 4 hours/day	22.7	20.2	13.1	12.8
More than 4 hours/day	19.5	10.8	12.4	15.6
N =	259	278	264	330
TOTAL SAMPLE				
None				11.7
1 hour or less/day				24.5
More than 1 hour but less than 3 hours/day				33.7
3 - 4 hours/day				17.4
More than 4 hours/day				12.8
N =				2204

CONCLUSION

Eating and exercising are perhaps the two most visible aspects of personal health. These data suggest that many young people in Nebraska are practicing neither good nutrition nor good exercise. If long term health is related to the ability to learn and to be a productive citizen, then the question for school officials relates to their responsibility to address more effectively both exercise and nutrition education. Both the health and the education of young Americans are the focus of national goal systems. Each depends upon the other. The contribution of the schools to improving education through health and health through education deserves serious discussion.

Getting the Most Out of Survey Results

A manual for community leaders and others interested in using survey results to promote drug-free schools and communities

This manual is written especially for people who are involved in or planning a school or community survey. In easy-to-understand terms *Getting the Most Out Of Survey Results* addresses basic questions to consider when planning a survey.

Once a survey is completed, the real challenge begins: making the best use of the results. In a simple step-by-step approach this manual addresses all the major points of turning survey results into plans for action.

Topics covered in *Getting the Most Out of Survey Results*

- What We Need to Know About Surveys
- The Audience
- Surveys As Needs Assessments and Surveys as Evaluation
- Turning Results into Goals and Objectives
- Interpreting Survey Results in a Planning/Action Context
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